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ANTIQUE OBJETS D'ART.

ANCIENT artistic articles of a decorative character, whether in furniture or its accessories, in mural attachments or mountings, or serving other purposes, are subjects of an extensive trade, aggregating annually millions of dollars. Europe and Asia are being perpetually scoured by experts in search of them. A Toledo blade may, perchance, be found in Mexico, and the handiwork of a Cellini in Ceylon.

Many great prizes are brought to light by the merest chance. Wars, the demolition and reconstruction of buildings, had a large share in the dispersion of medieval productions. Napoleon enriched France with the artistic spoils of Spain and the Low Countries, and England has looted India and China for their treasures. The exigencies of noble families place many treasures on the market. The decrease of wealthy collectors is also a means of scattering antique objects. A sale of ancient objects d'art has just closed in Rome, which occupied no less than thirty days, and it is to be resumed in Paris in March. The very graves and excavations under ruined cities or temples, pay their tribute to the assiduous collector.

Antique industrial productions are prolific of suggestions in the way of modern design and

woolen tapestry, which were family secrets, no modern dies being capable of securing such durable lustre. Tapestries of the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries are to be seen in all their original brilliancy, with the exception of gold and silver threads introduced in the high lights, and which are somewhat tarnished.

Among valued acquisitions in wood carving, dating from the Renaissance period, when the styles of decoration that had previously been regularly developed in classic forms were broken up, are mantels, staircases, wainscoting and ceiling panels, tables, consoles, writing desks, bookcases, chairs and benches, linen chests, plate boxes, and ecclesiastical articles of furniture. All these, year by year, become more rare and proportionately costly.

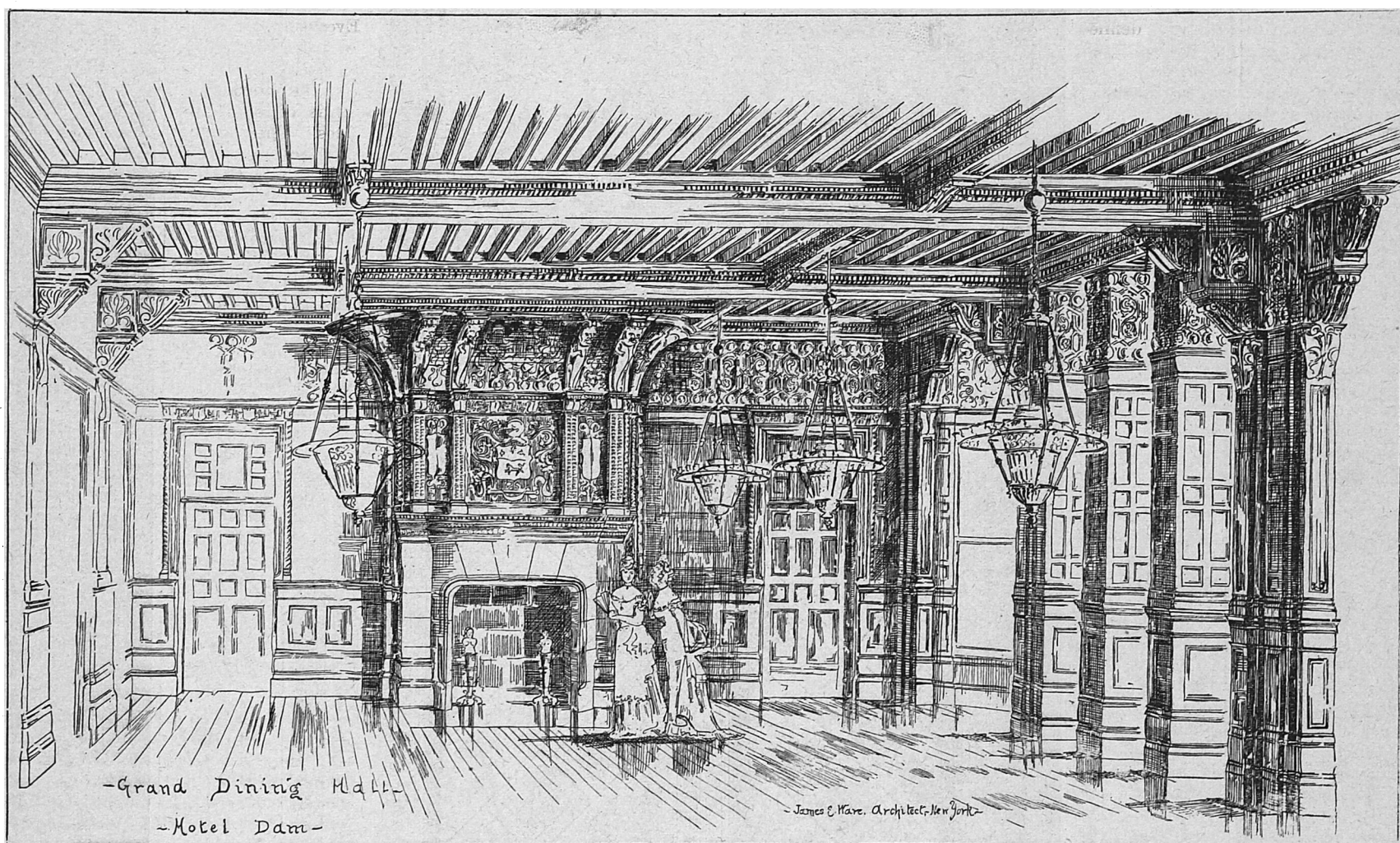
The labored carving on linen chests betoken the domestic value attached to them. Frequently the centres of the lower panels contain portraits of the master and mistress of the house with heads of cherubs in surrounding foliage, possibly likenesses of their children, the upper panels showing emblematic processional figures, indicative of felicity. On the sides of these elevated chests are shown in relief, half open rolls of linen. The locks are finished with admirable precision, and many reveal a silvery lustre of surface.

In furniture, valued alike for design and carving, it is the continental specimens and not

salt cellars and bowls, showing exquisite repoussé work, full of life and expression, in gold and silver gilt. Much fine art work in silver has perished through want of the protection of gilt. Iron locks, hinges, coffers, in short, all old iron work showing artistic treatment, finds ready sale.

There is evidence that beaten and chiseled work in silver and brass, whether in plates, vases, candlesticks, candelabra, mirror frames and other articles not unfrequently set with enameling, painted or picked out in gold and colors, were the pride of the wealthy in past ages. What is noticeable in good artistic treatment is the proportion maintained of the metal according to the purpose it had to serve. The branched arms of the candelabra are slender and frequently unadorned, gracefully curved, but leaving the ornamentation for the stand.

In tapestries used as wall panels or portières, the larger subjects are set off to best advantages in lofty and well lighted rooms to which they impart a nobleness of aspect. The scenes in the best examples afford atmospheric effects of distance that impress beyond painting on canvas the realism of the scene on the mind, and the illusion, whether representing historic, pastoral, allegorical scenes, or local and family legends. The freedom of, and excellence of execution in the early tapestries, was due to the schools of design of Italy and Flanders. Certain masters of the art



DINING ROOM OF HOTEL DAM, NEW YORK. DESIGNED BY JAMES E. WARE.

execution. Is it in carvings? Witness the artistic, refined, and vigorous expression of the Italian, the working bold and clear, plants and foliage seeming ready to overleap the bounds assigned them, or the truthful, though homely domestic portrayals of the Hollander carvers in their cabinet panels. Is it in textiles? The study of the color on flat ornament is an indispensable study for treatment of walls and painted glass.

There is much in antique productions that cannot be imitated with the same mechanical excellence. This is illustrated in metallic repoussé work wrought by the hammer and chisel. In tapestry, which attained its perfection in the 16th century, the workers being trained in the Flemish and Italian schools. In ceramic art such as that of S. Donato, and the marvelous medieval enamels.

There are not a few secret processes which have died out, having been kept in families for generations. Such is that of the lustre of certain Hispano Moresco earthen ware with its iridescent glow of copper or gold, the last producer of which died a century since at Manesas, near Valencia. For the discovery of the means of producing this lustre visible only at certain angles of light, Italian and Spanish potters have worked unceasingly, whilst the French Government have offered a prize, yet unclaimed, of 100,000 francs. Then there are the dies of the threads of silk and

those of England that properly rank as antique *objets d'art*, the early English designs being invariably reflexes of French fashions.

Some of the medieval iron work, with which in late years our artists have had the opportunity of becoming better acquainted, should infuse fresh spirit into decorative metallurgic art in design and treatment. There is no appearance of harshness or angularity in these types; in fact, mechanism does not usurp the throne of high art; there is that expression in countless articles which show their adaptation and fitness for the purpose. The handles of many costly chests show no high finish, strength only being required, but still are in a measure artistic.

In various specimens there is a sufficiency of fine drawn and finely finished work stands in strong contrast to the more sturdy sections out of which it has been drawn, and whilst delicate portions are protected, the surfaces are well relieved by cold tool markings. That some medieval iron articles may be turned to good account, is illustrated in iron fire screens, of no mean merit, with coils and chains, and standard bearing shelves and rilled receptacles for dishes, some of these, to our knowledge, being in actual use.

Some of the most costly objects pertain to metalworkers' craft, in gold, silver, and brass, as in crosses, reliquaries, chalices and drinking cups,

obtained a reputation in these that continues through the ages, and their names to-day are familiar to the merest tyro in art.

As to Oriental ceramic art, there are past periods when, as with certain classes of Europe, a higher perfection was attained. Extraordinary high prices are realized for the ware produced under certain ancient Chinese dynasties, and for Satsuma ware under ancient Emperors of Japan. Fully appreciated in China and Japan, few specimens leave those countries. Ornamental ceramic art is to be admired for the simplicity of means and facility of execution by which marvelous effects are produced, the eyes guiding the hands of the workers.

In viewing these, as other antiques, one cannot but believe in inherited traditional skill. It is an error to suppose that Chinese and Japan decorations of porcelain always represent comic, fantastic, or grotesque features. In many of the old vases, especially the Chinese, there is a pomp of ornament with figures elegant and splendid; interiors, furniture, and stuffs, in good taste with flowers and other accessories rendered without profusion and with admirable grace. There is no pretension to deceive the eye, to reproduce a life-like picture—always impossible on a vase. The vases of the best periods are in the purest style of decoration, charming to the eye in design and color.